CEO of pipe maker Ipex thankful for a loyal team

By Catherine Kavanagh
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When the pandemic struck, pipe manufacturer Ipex Group equipped some of its North American employees to work from home and took steps to protect the health and safety of those at its manufacturing plants and distribution centers.

The Canadian company with a U.S. headquarters, Ipex USA LLC, in Pineville, N.C., also held ongoing mental health and well-being activities and webinars to support employees’ physical, social, mental and financial well-being.

If needed, colleagues from various departments and divisions would cover for one another to keep up with North American demand for thermoplastic piping systems for the municipal, irrigation, industrial, plumbing, mechanical, electrical and telecommunications sectors, according to Ipex Group CEO Alex Mestres.

“The care and commitment our employees demonstrated toward each other during the pandemic also extended to our customers,” Mestres said in an email. “During these very challenging times, we encountered labor shortages. When this hindered our ability to service our customers, some of our salaried employees volunteered to work shifts in the plants to ensure that the production lines could run.”

With an estimated $900 million in annual sales, Ipex USA/Group is the fifth-largest pipe, profile and tubing extruder in North America, according to Plastics News’ latest ranking.

Mestres has been CEO of the Ipex Group of Cos. since 2013, stepping into the role with a multiprong goal: rebuilding the leadership team to support a performance-driven organization with a customer-focused strategy to accelerate growth.

During the pandemic, the Ipex organization worked diligently and managed customer expectations “exceedingly well,” Mestres said.

“To thank our employees for the care and commitment they have shown, both last summer and this year, we provided all employees with either three additional vacation days or an appreciation bonus,” he said.

For Mestres, the pandemic drove home several lessons.

“First, it solidified my belief in the importance of caring for employees and their safety,” he said. “While not the intention, it resulted in engagement beyond expectations and allowed us to adapt as an organization in these very uncertain and difficult times.”

Then, there were challenges related to staffing, supply chain interruptions and raw material shortages that resulted in significant price increases.

“But treating customers fairly, with full transparency and open communication, resulted in the strengthening of many relationships, even when our supply to them was less than optimal,” Mestres said of his second lesson learned.

“And finally, realizing that we could potentially accomplish many of the tasks and business activities remotely and virtually was certainly an eye-opener,” he added.

Mestres credits a former boss and mentor for setting an example of how to implement a customer-focused culture in a fast-growing organization.

“Personally, he was empowering, a good listener; he really challenged my thinking, which made me a better leader; and he was always a glass half-full person,” Mestres said.

Mestres also said he would like to be remembered for leaving the Ipex organization stronger than when he became CEO and a place where people can thrive while respecting and supporting each other.

“I also hope that I have been able to solidify an unshakable customer-centric corporate culture for future generations,” Mestres said. “And finally, I hope that some of my actions and decisions during my tenure as a CEO have positively affected and improved the lives and careers of a few of my colleagues.”